

Director pleased with role

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

ROCHESTER — The experience of campus-ministry while attending SUNY College at Geneseo was so positive for Shannon Loughlin that “it was a big part of my discernment” in defining her career path.

So big, in fact, that Loughlin eventually returned to her alma mater as the first-ever lay director of campus ministry. After more than three years in that position, she has moved on to another ground-breaking position: Loughlin began Jan. 13 in the newly created role of diocesan director of young-adult and campus ministry. This marks the first time that the two responsibilities have been combined into one full-time job.

“It’s a very natural connection to have campus and young-adult ministry together,” said Loughlin, 31. “I’m very pleased with the position. It’s a fabulous statement on the part of our diocese about the importance of young adults to the church.”

In the collegiate component of her work, Loughlin serves as coordinator for all Catholic campus-ministry directors at colleges located within the diocese. Having this role, she said, allows for a better “long-term vision” as to how college students can best be served. She added that campus ministry is in an evolving phase, noting, “As we continue to experience the priest shortage, we’ll continue to look at new models.”

Loughlin speaks from firsthand experience on that point. In becoming campus-ministry director at SUNY Geneseo in 1999, she replaced Father Jim Hewes, who had served in that role the previous 12 years.

Although Loughlin took over a well-established program — as a student, she had organized service trips for many rural-ministry initiatives — she faced the challenge of organizing sacramental coverage from priests at nearby churches, rather than from an on-campus priest. However, Loughlin said priests were readily willing to assist, and that students enjoyed having a lay person as director — particularly a woman, factoring in SUNY Geneseo’s mostly female student population.



Leila Navidi

Shannon Loughlin, the new diocesan director of young-adult and campus ministry, meets with other young adults Feb. 19 at Johnny’s Smoke-Free Irish Pub in Rochester for a session of the “Theology on Tap” series.

Young Adult

“I loved it,” Loughlin said of her directorship at Geneseo. “Working in campus ministry, it’s an incredible time of life — such an inquisitive and searching time. So many things are being learned in a very intense way.”

Ideally, Loughlin would like to see students take their campus-ministry experience into parish settings after graduation. Although only a handful of parish young-adult ministries are active at diocesan parishes — such as Blessed Sacrament in Rochester — she said this shouldn’t deter young adults from taking part in parish life.

“Every parish has its own identity. But there’s a lot a young adult can offer to any kind of parish,” Loughlin said.

In turn, she added, parishes should openly welcome young adults while realizing this age group is a comparatively mobile one. “They might not be able to stay in your town for 20 or 30 years,” she said.

Regarding diocesan programs, Loughlin plans to organize a new young-adult committee that will target ministry to Catholics in their 20s and 30s in all 12 counties. She

seeks to establish regular coffee-house nights, and has already scheduled a major event on Aug. 3 at St. Thomas More Church in Brighton. Bishop Matthew H. Clark will celebrate Mass that day, with a picnic to follow.

In general, Loughlin said she hopes to increase young-adult activities that target “worship, service and faith formation.” She added that Odyssey, the existing young-adult outreach, will likely continue operating as a group offering social opportunities within Monroe County.

Despite her administrative role, Loughlin said that she travels frequently in the hopes of maintaining personal contact with college students and other young adults. “Thinking like a young adult means constantly meeting young adults,” she remarked.

Loughlin is a native of Clifton Park, near Albany. She earned her bachelor’s degree in psychology from SUNY Geneseo in 1993, then got her master’s in pastoral ministry from Duquesne University in 1996. She is currently working on her doctorate in systematic theology from Duquesne.

She lives in Groveland, Livingston County, with her husband of seven years, Sean; stepson Zack, 13; and daughter Liliana, 5 months.

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